*Makary Górzyński**

Soviet war cemeteries in Poland as places of imperial memory and power. Three case studies**

Sowieckie cmentarze wojenne w Polsce jako miejsca imperialnej pamięci i władzy. Trzy studia przypadku

Abstract: During winter of 1945, Soviet Red Army units, defeating the Wehrmacht on the pre-1939 territories of the Second Polish Republic, left behind many wartime graveyards. From early spring of 1945, the Soviet military command ordered the construction of monumental war memorials. In this article, I argue that material structures and spatial features of those cemeteries-mausoleums show and articulate a direct political aim behind their establishment — one of Soviet imperial policy towards Poland. By close examination of necropolies in three middle-sized or small Polish towns — Tomaszów Mazowiecki, Kalisz and Wolsztyn — I discuss their urban contexts, ideologically marked elements of form and spatial arrangements. This study offers a new approach to Soviet cemeteries in Poland, shedding light on their long-time usage as tools of imperial propaganda, related to the Great Patriotic War of the USSR.

Key words: Soviet War Cemeteries, Great Patriotic War, Polish History, Soviet Union, Twentieth Century

Abstrakt: Zimą 1945 r. oddziały sowieckiej Armii Czerwonej, pokonując Wehrmacht na terenach przedwojennej Rzeczypospolitej, pozostawiły po sobie wiele pochówków wojennych. Od wczesnej wiosny 1945 r. radzieckie dowództwo wojskowe zaczęło akcję budowy monumentalnych cmentarzy. W niniejszym artykule stawiam tezę, że struktury materialne i cechy przestrzenne tych cmentarzy-mauzoleów wskazują i wyrażają bezpośredni cel stojący za ich powstaniem — realizację sowieckiej polityki imperialnej wobec Polski. Analizując cmentarze w trzech średnich i małych polskich miastach — Tomaszowie Mazowieckim, Kaliszu i Wolsztynie — omawiam ich konteksty urbanistyczne, ideologicznie nacechowane elementy formy i układy przestrzenne. Artykuł jest propozycją nowego podejścia do sowieckich cmentarzy w Polsce, rzucając światło na ich długoletnie wykorzystywanie jako narzędzi imperialnej propagandy, związanej z mitem wielkiej wojny ojczyźnianej ZSRR.

Słowa kluczowe: radzieckie cmentarze wojenne, Wielka Wojna Ojczyźniana, historia Polski, Związek Radziecki, wiek dwudziesty

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I. Introduction. II. Three Soviet war cemeteries in central-western Poland: a brief overview.
III. Monuments of power and repression. IV. Conclusion

I. Introduction

From mid-1944 to early 1945, the Soviet Red Army operated — among other military forces — on pre-1939 Polish, Belarusian, Ukrainian and Lithuanian territories, defeating the Wehrmacht. However, military advances did not create the conditions for the restoration of the pre-war states, the Second Polish Republic included (which had been a member of the Allied coalition). On the contrary, Soviet forces not only crushed the German and Axis military powers but also repressed most of the Polish Home Army and other non-pro-Soviet groups, installing the Stalin-backed communist regime.[1] Although it was mostly Polish soldiers — anti-German guerrillas or members of the regular People's Polish Army dependent on the Soviets — who fought and died in several battles during the 1944−1945 campaigns in Poland,[2] the most elaborate and complex military cemeteries in the country were erected for members of the Red Army. Soon after the seizure of territory (even before the end of Second World War), the Soviet military command ordered and carried out the construction of permanent war memorials across East-Central Europe, including Poland.[3] Their primary role was the commemoration of the 600,000 soldiers who died during battles with the Wehrmacht, and secondarily, to install memory-building objects in central urban locations that would bear witness to the Soviet Union's victory over Nazi Germany in line with the official propaganda.[4] Several of the 327 cemeteries erected in Poland — not to mention other huge memorials that showcased gratitude to the Soviet Union and the Red Army[5] — were on a monumental scale.[6]

In this study, inspired by recent studies on memorials of "gratitude to the Red Army" in Poland by Dominika Czarnecka,[7] I briefly discuss three Red Army cemeteries and attempt to render their material structures as places that contributed to the creation of imperial power. In my view, they were also part of a memory-building process in which the Red Army's annexation of Poland was represented as 'liberation' and 'denazification'. I describe spatial structures and the materiality of the Red Army cemeteries in middle-sized provincial Polish towns of Tomaszów Mazowiecki, Kalisz, and Wolsztyn (all located across the 1945 battlefields of the 33rd Army of the Belarusian Front) (Fig. 1), trying to outline their common features that I expect to be specific for many Soviet military burial monuments in towns across Poland. What connects objects in question and makes them distinctive (in the urban context of those middle-sized towns) is their prominent location in city centres.

Following the spatial turn-related methodologies of architectural history, I propose that these monuments were agents, material structures that acted together to build the new post-war

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[1] Davies N. 1982, pp. 467–491; Snyder T. 2003; Davies N. 2007; Applebaum A. 2012.

[2] Szafran Cz., Szostak J., Kopański T. 2005.

[3] Scenes. 1966; Koszowy A., Wicka A., Krząstek T. 2016; for exemplary studies see Kostka K. 2014; Krüger A. 2016.

[4] Tumarkin N. 1994, pp. 99–101.

[5] Czarnecka D. 2021.

[6] For official records, see AAN, MZOwW, ref. 2127; AAN, PZPR KCW, ref. 237.V.121. The number of cemeteries in Poland may differ according to sources; the quoted files include separate cemeteries, but not all wartime sectors of communal or parochial cemeteries. Currently, the Institute for National Remembrance register covers 705 burial places of Soviet Red Army soldiers in Poland, see: Oświadczenie IPN. 2021.

[7] Czarnecka D. 2013; Czarnecka D. 2021.

Fig. 1. The 1945 Soviet Red Army cemeteries in Tomaszów Mazowiecki, Kalisz and Wolsztyn (marked in red, from right to left); the arrows show the Belarusian and Ukrainian front advances from January to April 1945; source: Encyklopedia. 1975, p. 662; prepared by M. Górzyński
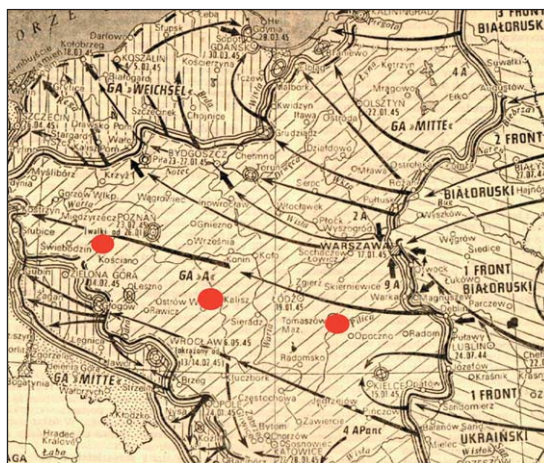
Soviet empire, of which Poland was an important component.[8] Inspired by the Bruno Latour's and Albena Yaneva's discussion of the Actor-Network-Theory (ANT) approach to studies on architecture and built environment especially,[9] I would like to see Soviet war cemeteries as material 'active modulators', agents of imperial power that were installed in Polish cities to orchestrate the official propaganda of 'liberation' through their materiality and its affective potential. In such a view — to paraphrase John Archer's remarks on the role that architecture has in production of societies[10] — these cemeteries were spatial frameworks of the Soviet policies towards Poland, acting not as 'representation' of these policies but as their tools. My aim here is to initiate discussion on symbolical functions of those material objects after examining their design, structure, and urban location from the perspective of an architectural historian. I also argue that material (of space and architecture structures) of Soviet war cemeteries are bearers of the prolonged political meaning: of conquest, imperialism, and political colonialism.[11] But what makes this approach interesting is the abovementioned 'prolonged activity' of material culture, as proposed, e.g. by Tim Dant.[12] Henceforth, I will also briefly characterise different and complicated responses of the Polish authorities to these structures in the post-war era.

In this contribution I refer not only to material culture studies, but to the importance of memory-culture in modern societies, as popularised by Pierre Nora's concept of *lieux de mémoire*.[13] Hence, I am interested in war cemeteries as monuments that convey politically-driven, fabricated memories of the war to present and future generations. The condensed memory of victory and liberation, as well as the context of the propaganda related to the Great Patriotic War of the Soviet 'nations', against the Nazi regime are of key importance here.[14] I hope that by presenting case studies from provincial Polish towns, this paper will contribute to widespread studies of the 'dissonant heritage' discussing material legacies of conflicts, totalitarian regimes or mass violence.[15]

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[8] Bachmann-Medick D. 2018.
[9] Latour B. 2007; Latour B., Yaneva A. 2008.
[10] Archer J. 2005.
[11] For an exemplary study of this kind that inspired my approach, see Szymański W. 2016.
[12] Dant T. 1999; Interpreting Objects. 2003.
[13] Realms. 1997; Realms. 1998; Rethinking France. 2001; Kończal K. 2012.
[14] Markwick R.D. 2012; Domańska M. 2019.
[15] O'Keeffe T. 2007; Human Remains. 2015; War and Cultural. 2015; Heritage. 2019; Heritages. 2019; Heritage. 2021.

In the following paragraphs, I briefly present and describe materiality of proposed three cemeteries, offering discussion of their usage as agents of imperial Soviet propaganda, which aims were supported or materialized through spatial structures of these monuments. My article is based on an extensive fieldwork — Tomaszów Mazowiecki, Kalisz and Wolsztyn — and a variety of archival, mostly Polish sources. The main objective is to expand the research field on the Soviet war cemeteries in Poland. Hence, my study does not claim to be a comprehensive analysis, but rather a research proposal for further discussion, calling for comparative studies, framed also within international discussions.

II. Three Soviet war cemeteries in central-western Poland: a brief overview

The process of erection of Soviet war cemeteries in Poland can be briefly illustrated by the case of Tomaszów Mazowiecki (Fig. 2), a town established during the industrial boom of the nineteenth century by private entrepreneurs in the Russia-dependent Polish Kingdom.[16] Its layout, consisting of two grids of regular urban blocks and an industrial suburb, was characterised by axial boulevards leading to large rectangular squares that acted as local markets. During the 1900s, the Russian imperial administration erected the Russian Orthodox church in the middle of the main market square (Fig. 3), following contemporary urban projects of marking imperial-religious power as a dominant force in Polish towns. Priority in urban spaces was
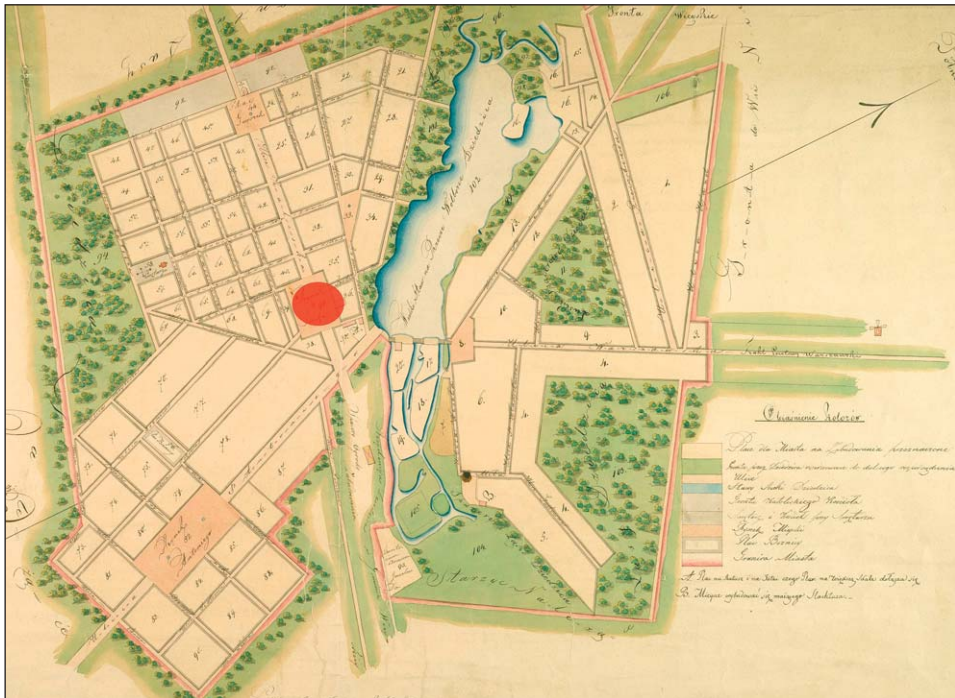

Fig. 2. Location of the Soviet war memorial in Tomaszów Mazowiecki marked on a nineteenth-
-century plan of the town; source: AGAD, ZK, ref. 337-21; prepared by M. Górzyński

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[16] For an outline of Tomaszów's Mazowiecki history, see Tomaszów Mazowiecki. 1980; Ostrowscy. 2020.

Fig. 3. The Orthodox Church in Tomaszów Mazowiecki, demolished post-1918, a postcard; source: Tomaszów. [1915]

given to initiatives of public architecture, imposed by the Russian administrative and military elites in the occupied country.[17]After Poland regained independence during the final phase of the Great War (1918), the Orthodox church was demolished. As a result, the square was adapted to host military parades and official state commemorations in front of the new Tadeusz Kościuszko monument. The latter was dismantled by the Wehrmacht in 1939, at the beginning of the Second World War. Six years later (in mid-January 1945), after battling with the German occupiers in the vicinity of Tomaszów, the Soviet military command established mass graves for its soldiers. Not surprisingly, despite the existence of several cemeteries on the outskirts of the town, the Soviet authorities chose the site of the former Orthodox church in recognition of its importance as an imperial Russian monument that once dominated the centre. The cemetery was erected between 4 May 1945 and 30 August 1945, following the orders of the Soviet military command in Tomaszów and designs prepared by Red Army officers.[18] It was a sovereign decision that the temporary Polish municipal administration, dominated by local communists backed by Russian forces, was forced to accept.[19] Also, the collaboration between the Polish authorities and Polish workers on the site signified the friendly bonds that tied the 'liberated' town to the 33rd Army units.[20]

The fulcrum of the boulevard that culminated in the square and the near crossing of major thoroughfares was a sixteen-metre concrete obelisk crowned with the Red Star, from which axis dozens of mass and individual graves of soldiers and officers were sited. Small gravestones lined the walkways and flowerbeds. Capt. W.J. Garanin — the memorial's designer — incorporated several other urban park features into the project, including shrubberies, benches, and even two ornate fountains cladded with colourful tiles and marble plates (Fig. 4 a–c).The memorial, therefore, combined elements of ancient provenance (e.g. the obelisk) with the idea of the cemetery as an urban park. It was deeply immersed in the everydayness of post-war Tomaszów because of its prominent location. The combination of cemetery, imperial memorial, and square/

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[17] For a detailed account of Russian rule in the central provinces of Poland, partitioned by Russia, Prussia, and Austria from 1772 to 1795 and then occupied, see Weeks T.R. 1996; Rolf M. 2015. For a catalogue of Orthodox churches in the Polish Kingdom from 1815 to 1915, see Cynalewska-Kuczma P. 2004.

[18] For archival sources see AP Piotrków Trybunalski OTM, MRNiPMRNwTM, ref. 1642–1647; MTM, DH, ref. MT/H/735; Ziółkowska G., Ziółkowski M. 2015; for urban history of this area see Fronczkowski M. 2022. I would like to thank Mr Daniel Warzocha from the Museum in Tomaszów for his kind assistance.

[19] MTM, DH, ref. MT/H/735.

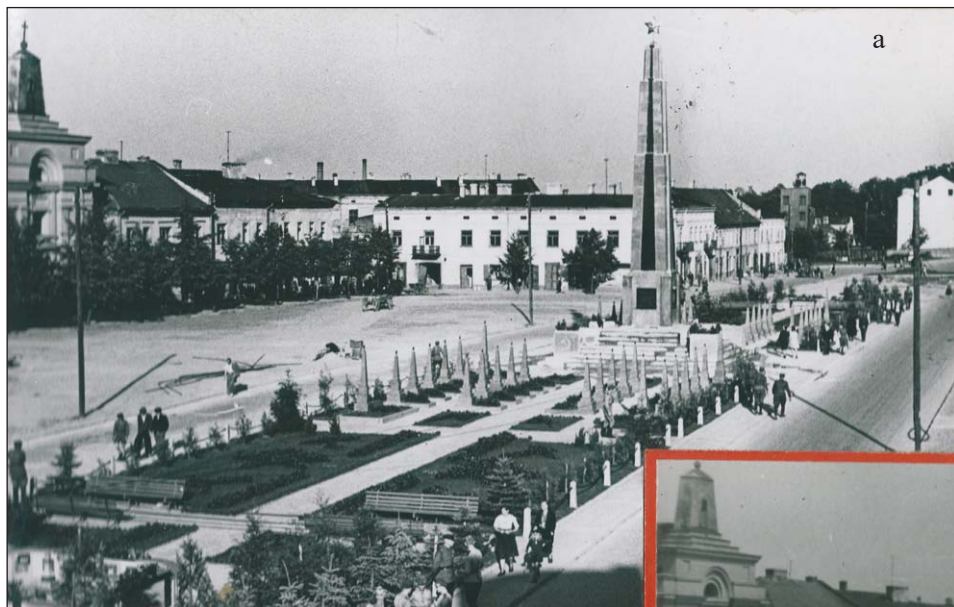[20] MTM, DH, ref. MT/H/735, plate 28.

Fig. 4 a–c. a) The 1945 Soviet war memorial in Tomaszów Mazowiecki. b) An overview of one of the decorative fountains. c) Capt. W.J. Garanin posing with a granite plate documenting the construction and design of the cemetery in Tomaszów Mazowiecki. Photos from 1945; source: MTM, DH, ref. MT/H/735

park is suggestive of the intention to create an attractive public space in a city impacted by war and Nazi occupation. The square was remodelled to align with the new Russian imperialism of the Soviet period. We may refer to this example as the reutilisation of a former site of an Orthodox Imperial Church of the Tsarist era as a monument of imperial rule and cultural-religious conquest, and its replacement by a new system of signs reframing identity, history, and memory through material structures of the cemetery.[21]

The second example I will discuss comes from Kalisz, an industrial town and regional capital in Greater Poland. The town was established in the Middle Ages. As in Tomaszów, probably in early spring of 1945,[22] the Soviet army command decided on the location of the three-hectare cemetery; then supervised its construction under the direction of Antoni Karolak, a local Polish architect working for the pre-war municipality, who also designed the ensemble (along with Mieczysław Torcz).[23] Although several local companies took part in construction of this cemetery, it was the municipal administration who supervised and financed the works, conducted under guidance of its engineers.[24] A 1978 source claimed that it was "built by the population of Kalisz as a proof of memory and friendship to heroic soldiers who died for the national

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[21] The prewar monument of Tadeusz Kościuszko, which was dismantled by the Germans, was restored in 1948; from 1945 to 1948 the obelisk and cemeteries were central points of symbolic space in the town.

[22] Kościuszko M. 2023, p. 236.

[23] For archival sources see AP Kalisz, AMK, ref. 10, 59; AP Kalisz, WBPP, ref. 1033; for records of buried soldiers AP Kalisz, Martyn, ref. 783, 830; Małyszko S. 2021, pp. 265–270. Antoni Karolak and Mieczysław Torcz designed the cemetery; and the Red Army supervisors were Capt. Novikov and Col. Kotlarov.

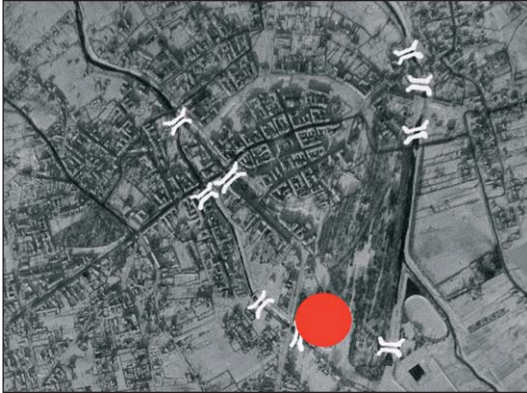[24] AP Kalisz, AMK, ref. 9, pp. 15, 27–28; Tabaka A., Błachowicz M. 2012.

Fig. 5. Aerial photograph of Kalisz, made by Luftwaffe, 26th January 1945; the location of the Soviet war cemetery marked by a dot; the urban nucleus of medieval origin is visible at the centre of the photograph (between the Prosna river channels); source: Zbrodnie. [n.d.]; prepared by M. Górzyński

Fig. 6. A 1956 (?) plate showing the layout of the Red Army war cemetery in Kalisz, located in the section of the public park called the Ignacy Paderewski's Park; source: AP Kalisz, WBPP, ref. 1033

Fig. 7 a–b. Contemporary views of the architectural elements of the Red Army cemetery in Kalisz; photo by M. Górzyński
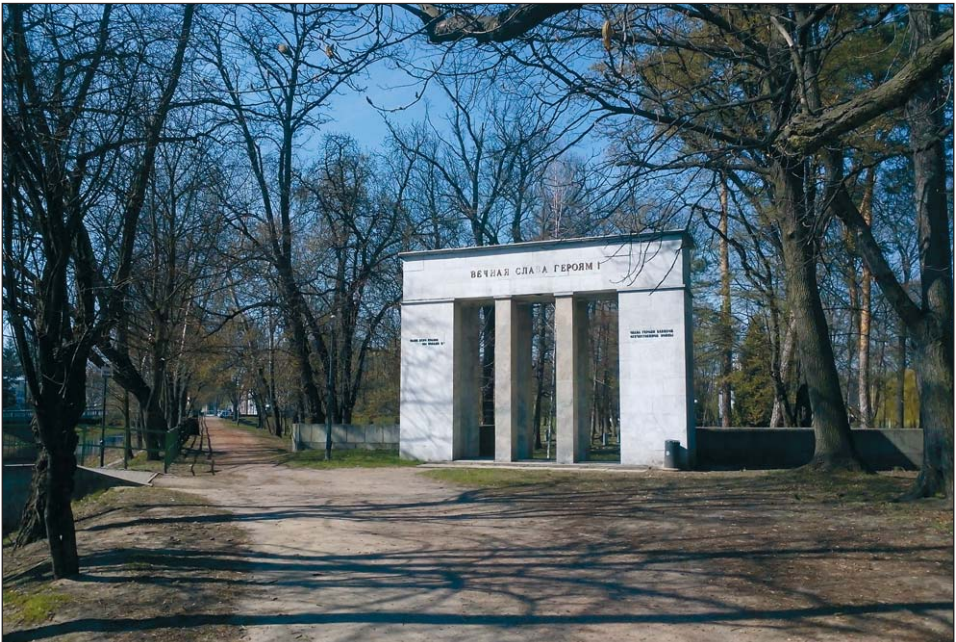
and social liberation of Poland".[25] More than 300 infantrymen who had fought in and around the town were buried in the municipal park near the local theatre, close to elegant boulevards and the historic centre (Fig. 5). As in Tomaszów, an axial grouping of graves, both mass and individual (the latter for officers only), was quickly arranged following the existing layout of the garden in the spring and summer of 1945 (Fig. 6). The roundabout at the centre was crowned with a twenty-five-metre concrete obelisk topped by the Red Star and flanked by four howitzers on platforms. A monumental, elevated gateway was erected on the south side of the cemetery, topped with the inscription "Eternal Glory to Heroes" (of the Soviet-Axis War; the mentioned inscription is still preserved). This structure facing the Prosna river channels is opening and closing the vista of what I propose to call as 'the Soviet city of the dead heroes'. It was framed within the wider landscape of Kalisz and its environs and was a central feature of the local public park (Fig. 7 a–b). a special inscription (in Russian) was placed on the marble slabs of the obelisk, commemorating the 309 soldiers who were killed by the Nazis during the capture of Kalisz, as claimed in inscriptions, during the Great Patriotic War of the Soviet Union against Germany (from 1941 to 1945). Tellingly, there was no mention of the fact that Poland was an independent nation. Instead, readers were informed that the Red Army acted in Poland as a liberating force, freeing its citizens from the Nazi occupation and creating a goodwill alliance with the USSR. Such a narrative was fundamental to post-1945 propaganda concerning the war, the geopolitical legacy and memory of which was controlled (in East-Central Europe) by the Soviet Union. What was not mentioned was the fact known all too well by the general public of the time that in September 1939 Poland had been attacked by Hitler's and Stalin's armies acting in concert and that the 1944/45 'liberation' was another occupation.[26]

The last example is taken from Wolsztyn, a small county administrative centre on the western borders of Greater Poland with Silesia (Fig. 8). The 33rd Army the Soviet military command designated Wolsztyn as a burial place for around 362 officers who were killed fighting the Wehrmacht on the battlefields at the Odra river crossing, a bloody operation that opened the way to Berlin. a prestigious cemetery was erected on the site of the former Catholic parish graveyard (which was closed in 1910 and removed during the Second World War) in the city centre, facing local administrative buildings that were taken over by the Communist Party and used as Red Army headquarters (Fig. 9). It was designed under the auspices of the Soviet military command (as was the case in the previous examples) and constructed between April and July 1945; its official and festive opening took place in August 1945.[27] The entrance, situated by the main crossroads, railway station, and county offices, was flanked by massive, fortress-like pavilions topped with howitzers directed at the town centre, nearby administrative buildings of the Wolsztyn county offices and the railway station. The graves were grouped amongst the trees on both sides of the axial walkway. The focal point was a monumental bronze sculpture

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[25] MOZK, DH, ref. MOZK/H/5519.

[26] Staar R.F. 1962; Kersten K. 1993.

[27] AP Poznań, KPPPR, ref. 2, p. 5; ref. 6, pp. 4, 6, 13; AP Leszno, PPRN Wolsztyn, ref. 833; AP Zielona Góra, RMiUMGW, ref. 641. See also an inscription on the plaque at the back of the main monument. The cemetery was designed by K.K. Wasewicz, and construction was supervised by Mayor A.S. Aszkinaze. The monumental bronze sculpture of a soldier was designed by Edward Przymuszała and Józef Murlewski and cast in the Cegielski Works in Poznań. Stonework was provided by Zygmunt Gwiazdowski. During construction of this cemetery, local administration, urged by the Soviet forces, provided substantial help in workforce and materials. For this paper, I have not examined the second wartime cemetery in Wolsztyn that was created as a mass graveyard (for international, but since June 1941 mostly Soviet Union soldiers of various nationalities) adjacent to the German Nazi Stalag XXI C/H Wollstein. Around 4,000 soldiers died there of starvation and disease. They were buried on the site of the destroyed Jewish cemetery in Wolsztyn. In the post-war period a permanent monument with a statue of the soldier and two howitzers surrounded by a park-like greenery. See Poniedziałek Z. 2010, pp. 331–333; Jankowiak S. 2024, p. 434.
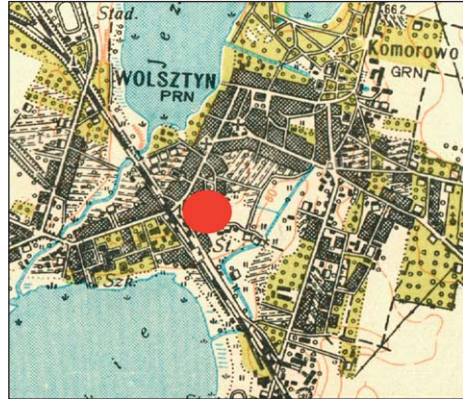
Fig. 8. Location of the Red Army officers'
cemetery in Wolsztyn, on a 1950s topographical
map; prepared by M. Górzyński

Fig. 9. One of two pavilions flanking the entrance to the officers' cemetery in Wolsztyn,
with the Soviet Union coat of arms and an inscription claiming that the Soviet victory of 1945
was righteous and glorious; source: AP Leszno, PPRN Wolsztyn, ref. 833

of a Soviet soldier on a large stone pedestal destroying some German armour and a swastika
(Fig. 10). Inscribed plates were mounted on the front of the pedestal, falsely claiming that the
Red Army liberated all nations of the Soviet community, "giving independence to the nations
of Europe".

Fig. 10. Monumental bronze sculpture of a Red Army soldier crushing Third Reich emblems, by Edward Przymuszała and Józef Murlewski, 1945; officers' cemetery in Wolsztyn; photo by M. Szlachciak

III. Monuments of power and repression

Following this brief description of cemeteries, I offer some preliminary ideas on their importance as spaces contributing to memory-building practices and imperial propaganda of the Soviet Union in the post-war Poland. Firstly, it is important to stress that each of the Soviet Red Army cemeteries — including the three cases briefly presented herein — were the earliest, the most expensive and monumental structures commemorating Second World War to be erected in public spaces in Polish cities. It ought to be stressed that Poland, which was invaded by Germany and the Soviet Union in September 1939, was the first victim of the official war. In the following years, millions of civilians were killed under the German and Soviet occupation by the Wehrmacht, SS, special forces (including those in ghettos, concentration and extermination camps, etc.) as well as the Red Army and NKVD, who were 'cleansing' Polish territories. However, the monumental cemeteries of the Great Patriotic War were established in dozens of Polish towns only for the Red Army soldiers, 'exporting' imperial memory of a victorious war between the USSR and the Third Reich without a mention of Poland as an independent subject of international politics.[28] It is also worth noting that 'liberating' Poland in 1945, it was the same Red Army's Belarusian Front, which had, in September 1939, invaded the country from the east, in accordance with the Ribbentrop-Molotov pact.[29] Moreover, the monumental cemeteries were constructed during the final phase of the Second World War, when the presence of Red Army's units across Polish territories was especially turbulent for local populations, just to mention plundering or wartime atrocities, like rapes or murders.[30] The communist regime installed in

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[28] Kersten K. 1991; Kersten K. 1993; Stalinism Revisited. 2009; Zaremba M. 2012.

[29] Piekałkiewicz J. 1999, pp. 130–135; Snyder T. 2018, pp. 152–190.

[30] E.g. see dramatic documents from Wolsztyn and its environs from 1945 and 1946; AP Poznań, UWP, ref. 3193; Stryjkowski K. 2021, pp. 27–51.

Poland in 1944 by Moscow was fully dependent on the Red Army and the subordinate units of the Polish People's Army. In this very context, the newly constructed cemeteries, acting as monuments, were dominant signs of imperial, forcibly instated power. The communist regime installed in Poland in 1944 by Moscow was fully dependent on the Red Army and the subordinate units of the Polish People's Army.[31]

Secondly, although in Polish archives, there are no extant materials on the official guidelines for the design of such objects, the three presented case studies demonstrate through their materiality that the role of those monuments in establishing the imperial regime was extremely important. The construction of cemeteries was closely related to the new memory of the 'Soviet family of nations' that was liberated from the Nazis, but then subordinated to the dominance of Moscow. Their locations, material structures containing affective potential (in their monumentality, axiality of compositions, dominance over public spaces of towns or in their important features like utilization of statues or objects related to the classical vocabulary of architecture, inscriptions) and political narratives inscribed in each ensemble support such interpretation.

Thirdly, my argument fuelled by the ANT and *lieux de mémoire*-related approach is furnished by the very 'functioning' of these cemeteries as stages of the official propaganda related to the memory of war. From the very beginning, Soviet cemeteries became places of official celebrations and memorials that were organised by the new Polish administration in commemoration of the Second World War (Fig. 11 a). For example, an opening of the cemetery in Wolsztyn was arranged by the local Polish Workers Party to celebrate "Soviet officers who fought for freedom of Slavic nations", with presence of schoolchildren, officials and military delegates.[32] Very quickly, as the process of Stalinisation accelerated from 1948 to the early 1950s, terms such as 'liberation' were concatenated with 'denazification' and referred not only to Nazi Germany and its Allies but also to Polish armed forces (independent of Russia), who were presented as 'Nazi allies' and 'fascists financed by the West'.[33] In the domination of urbanscapes, Soviet war cemeteries became objects of power and agents helping the institutionalised redirection of memory of the Second World War in a society that had been profoundly affected by German, and then Russian occupation.

Taking this into consideration, the archival data surprisingly show another interesting reaction to material/discursive qualities of Soviet war cemeteries in annexed Poland. Although cemeteries were in many places designated sites of annual commemorations and events by the totalitarian regime, some of them soon fell into neglect as local Polish administrations failed to provide maintenance. Somewhat contrary to the impression given by propaganda photographs of official gatherings, war anniversaries, and celebrations of 'liberation' held in front of obelisks and Soviet monuments, some of the cemeteries, mostly located in rural areas, got in disrepair. As an official report that was sent to the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party in early 1950s put it "the condition of several burial places of Soviet soldiers in the Polish People's Republic leaves much to be desired".[34] The Soviet military authorities urged the party officials or civil administration in Warsaw to intensify efforts to maintain the Red Army memorials. Only five years after their construction, many were in need of renovation, some had been devastated, and others were in an advanced state of neglect, caused by the lack of proper maintenance from local Polish administrations.[35] It is important to stress that in 1952, probably due

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[31] Behrends J.C. 2009.

[32] AP Poznań, KPPPR, ref. 6, p. 1, 6 or 13.

[33] As was the case with the famous propaganda poster released in February 1945 by the Soviet-dependent Polish People's Army, which depicted Polish Home Army members as "filthy dwarfs of reactionary forces"; Ciesielski S., Materski W., Paczkowski A. 2002; Mazur M. 2015.

[34] AAN, PZPR KCW, ref. LXXVI-941, p. 1.

[35] AAN, PZPR KCW, ref. LXXVI-941, p. 2; AAN, PZPR KCW, ref. 237.V.121, p. 3; AAN, MGK, ref. 9/12.

Fig. 11 a–b. a) Photographs documenting the official opening of the Soviet war cemetery and memorial in Tomaszów Mazowiecki, September 1945; source: MTM, DH, ref. MT/H/735. b) A set of photographs depicting the decrepit state of the pavilions flanking the entrance to the Wolsztyn cemetery, the 1958 official report of the Polish administration preceding the decision of demolition both pavilions. Source: AP Leszno, PPRN Wolsztyn, ref. 833; photo by M. Górzyński

to high maintenance costs, the government in Warsaw decided to exhume graves in most of the small cemeteries and burial places in villages and towns to build 'central' cemeteries under the control of the Polish communist authorities.[36] Even before the centralised effort to rescue many of the burial sites from oblivion (especially in the countryside), several smaller Soviet burial

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[36] AAN, PZPR KCW, ref. LXXVI-941, p. 3, Polish People's Republic Government resolution no. 365 from 1952, regarding the construction of war cemeteries.

grounds were relocated from city centres. As for towns in the vicinity of Kalisz — like Opatówek, Mikstat, and Raszków — Red Army cemeteries marked by obelisks with the Red Star had been positioned in central squares since 1945. These obelisks were all removed in 1948 following exhumation and relocated to Kalisz or local communal cemeteries far from the town centres.[37]

The most prominent example of this kind of action is found in Tomaszów Mazowiecki. In 1949, all the soldiers and officers buried in the market square were exhumed and re-buried in the Orthodox cemetery (on the outskirts of the city), which had been partly turned into a So-viet war memorial. All obelisks marking individual and mass graves from the 1945 monument were also relocated, leaving the central obelisk standing in isolation and since then serving as a monument of 'gratitude to the Red Army'.[38] Just as the proper maintenance of many cemeter-ies became an issue, there was a growing realisation in the late 1940s/early 1950s that most Soviet burial places had been created without any participation or oversight from the Polish side. They had been constructed during the war as the appurtenances of Stalinisation and signi-fied conquest rather than liberation. In my view, a few years after the war, it was clear to the Polish government, both on a local and national level, that many of these monuments were perceived, at least to some extent, as symbols of domination and Russian imperialism. Referring to methodological inspirations that fuelled my interpretation, it seems plausible to say that the monumental, affective structures of cemeteries as imperial memorials were not only costly to maintain, but also their presence, location and form were too oppressively supportive of politi-cal dependence of Poland from USSR. Since 1945, main public spaces of smaller cities in Poland have been dominated by objects of a rather clear imperial propaganda and violence, with inscrip-tions in Russian and elevated howitzers aimed towards towns, flanking sculptures of Red Army soldiers depicted as 'liberators'.

Although a detailed study has yet to be conducted, a preliminary reading of official docu-ments from the post-1945 Polish government archives suggests that it was the lack of interest to maintain these sites properly on the part of the local population that led to the neglect of some of the cemeteries and the subsequent decision to conduct nationwide exhumations. I argue that it was not only an effort to reduce maintenance costs of so many small burial sites, but also to show some independence from the Soviet control. Hence, the Polish administration decided to exhume soldiers and remove several local monuments or their parts, possibly in a quest for public legitimisation and at least partial sovereignty in the symbolic domain (Fig. 11 b).

Nonetheless, the still standing urban cemeteries of the Red Army preserved their importance for the official propaganda. Regarding memory-building activities related to imperial Soviet version of the Second World War's events and its importance to Poland, I would like to discuss another source briefly. In keeping with the geopolitical position of the Soviet Union, Polish post-war regimes, through their control of propaganda and the state apparatus, promoted the idea that Poland had been liberated not only from the Nazis but also from the bourgeois, 'cor-rupted' state of the pre-war years. From the beginning, they used many different media to portray the Red Army as a mainstay of the new world order and the Soviet Union as a guardian of 'global peace' in its capacity as a superpower.[39] The 1972 edition of the prominent Polish Second World War encyclopaedia claimed that Poland's alliance with the Soviet Union had transformed the former from a peripheral European state — once contested by neighbouring

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[37] AP Kalisz, SpwOW, ref. 104; Czarnecka D. 2013, pp. 37–38.

[38] The 1949 exhumation of the cemetery on the market square was incomplete, as excavations in 2014 showed, when another 53 skeletons were found. For a detailed account of the 1949 and 2014 exhumations, see Ziółkowska G., Ziółkowski M. 2015; see also Malewski A. 2023. As Reviewer of this article pointed out, the question of "how many unmarked graves are still left in the grounds of former military cemeteries" — not only in Poland — is still open.

[39] AP Piotrków Trybunalski OTM, ZPDU, ref. 1767.

countries — into an important player in international politics and a member of the "democratic community led by Moscow".[40] In several entries on the history of Second World War, the encyclopaedia's authors presented the official ideological discourse, which was based on the glorification of the Soviet Union as the 'defender of local populations' and 'liberator of nations' from the beginning of the war.[41] From this perspective, the Soviet Union entered the conflict in 1941, after it was attacked by the Third Reich; earlier conquests and annexations of Polish, Lithuanian, Latvian or Estonian territories and the government's alliance with Hitler's regime were distorted or obscured within the narrative and repackaged as a "consolidation of the Anti-Nazi front under the lead of the USSR."[42] The narrative about the Great Patriotic War of the USSR as *lieux de mémoire*, was fundamental for imperial Soviet and Russian geopolitical identities and set the tone for the viewpoint promoted in the Encyclopaedia.[43]

Contrary, in many families, the 1945 'liberation' was remembered as another threat to life and property, with drunken Red Army soldiers often raping Polish girls and women and plundering their villages, towns, and cities.[44] Interestingly, visits by relatives of Red Army soldiers to cemeteries located in Poland were often restricted by the Soviet authorities until the 1960s or even 1970s in an effort to suppress individual ways of remembering and commemoration. These were replaced by a collectivized vision of the war and the military effort of the Red Army (not its soldiers as singular subjects of memory practices).[45] As Catherine Merridale showed, memories of the Second World War in the Soviet Union were subject to strict control under the official propaganda preventing from individual grief and sorrow that could have political consequences to the regime.[46] Hence, cemeteries as memory-building places were to remain under the control of the State, which was interested in silencing or overshadowing personal tragedies in favour of imperial propaganda and the heroization of death under the banner of the Great Patriotic War.[47] Further exploring these problems, it would be interesting to discuss in detail the collectivization of memory about Red Army soldiers in Poland, in the name of the imperial Soviet agenda of the post-war period.

IV. Conclusion

As I tried to show in this reconnaissance, monumental war cemeteries were designed and built not only as a gesture in the burial and immortalisation of soldiers fighting the Nazi regime but also to set the stage for propaganda and political agency in the Sovietisation of Poland. It is important to stress that when most of those cemeteries were being created (from the early spring of 1945), the process of consolidating the power of the local Moscow-backed regime was still ongoing. Prominent structures of cemeteries festooned with obelisks, gateways, and elevated howitzers or sculptures, with inscriptions in Russian celebrating the victorious empire, were telling signifiers of imperial dominance over an annexed territory and society. Located in urban

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[40] Encyklopedia. 1975, p. 461 (entry *Polska*, a final part).

[41] Encyklopedia. 1975, pp. 776–777 (entry *Związek Socjalistycznych Republik Radzieckich*).

[42] Encyklopedia. 1975, p. 776.

[43] Brodala M., Lisiecka A., Ruzikowski T. 2001; Zaremba M. 2005; Polityka czy propaganda. 2009.

[44] Armia Czerwona. 2014; Snyder T. 2018, pp. 364–392; Czarnecka D. 2021, pp. 39–74.

[45] AP Zielona Góra, KW PZPR, ref. 342. a letter from 28 December 1988, describing an exemplary wartime family history from Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic. One of its members was killed in action during Odra river crossing battles (in the spring of 1945) and was buried in Wolsztyn. The family found out what happened to their relative only in 1964; they first time visited Wolsztyn probably in 1974. Visits to the grave were disrupted in 1988, when they discovered that it had been damaged by vandals.

[46] Merridale C. 2000.

[47] Nikulin N. 2016; Merridale C. 2019.

centres, the cemeteries were to become part of everyday life for town dwellers. As I showed in this work, following approach of the ANT-inspired conceptualization of spatial structures as agents of social changes and social life, these cemeteries were not merely 'resembling' imperial objectives of their creators but were used to accelerate state-promoted memory of WWII and prominence of 'victorious USSR'.

The materiality of those graveyards and their ceremonial role in various post-1945 discourses of the official commemoration, propaganda, and state-building activities of the Polish United Workers' Party (PZPR) reveal several conceptions of memory-building frameworks. Associating the Red Army soldiers with liberators, heroes, and a victorious force that 'gave independence' to post-1945 Poland was part of the attempt to seek recognition of the communist regime in East-Central Europe. In my view, cemeteries were useful tools to this purpose. It is important to remember, that these post-Second World War investments followed earlier experiences and practices in the towns across the USSR and could be considered in the framework of the Soviet mass propaganda related to the victory over Third Reich, but also discussed within wider context of modern political monuments.[48] Henceforth, their material form could be analysed in further interdisciplinary and comparative studies in terms of the historical forces (politics, relations of power, and so on) that led to their establishment at the early stage of sovietisation and the imperial conquest of East-Central Europe by the Soviet Union.

As the present preliminary study shows, the Soviet myth of a righteous and glorious war was reinforced by the construction of war cemeteries in East-Central Europe (including Poland), the ambition of which dwarfed their nearest Tsarist equivalents but followed instrumentalization of memory-building sites and monuments in Twentieth-Century worldwide.[49]

Fig. 12. Parts of the marble cladding from the Soviet war cemetery in Kalisz revealing their hidden story – an erased memory of certain pre-war events. Remains of the inscription in Polish: "1935 | Pokój Ich [duszom]" (Peace to their [souls]); photo by M. Górzyński

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[48] Tumarkin N. 1994; Rolf M. 2013.
[49] Åman A. 1992; Kattago S. 2009; Rolf M. 2013.

Last but not least, the materiality of those objects reveals their disputed or hidden past, for example, their reuse of fragments recovered from pre-1939 Polish commemorative plates or monuments destroyed by the Germans during the occupation (Fig. 12).[50] In my opinion, the cemeteries in question, presenting monumental structures spatially dominating over medium-sized Polish towns — as burial places for individual soldiers of different origins and nations who fought in the Red Army — were designed, as many other wartime cemeteries, as tools of propaganda with the Great Patriotic War myth in mind. They articulated an enforced memory that the new Soviet-dependent Poland authorities and their citizens had to internalise and act upon. Such a narrative as an alternative memory of the Second World War underpinned by the imperial and aggressive politics of Moscow is fuelling the present-day Russian invasion of Ukraine and trying to justify brutal conquest as 'liberation'.

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AAN [Archiwum Akt Nowych], PZPR KCW [Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza. Komitet Centralny w Warszawie], ref. LXXVI-941 (*Pomniki wdzięczności Armii Radzieckiej i cmentarze wojenne żołnierzy radzieckich — stan, utrzymanie, tworzenie nowych. Notatki, wykazy cmentarzy, korespondencja*); 237.V.121 (*Prokuratura. Wojsko (1952–1953). Notatki i korespondencja w sprawie współpracy z dowództwem poszczególnych okręgów Wojsk Armii Radzieckiej, w sprawie cmentarzy radzieckich i in.*)

AGAD [Archiwum Główne Akt Dawnych], ZK [Zbiór Kartograficzny], ref. 337-21.

AP Kalisz [Archiwum Państwowe w Kaliszu], AMK [Akta Miasta Kalisza], ref. 9, 10, 59.

AP Kalisz [Archiwum Państwowe w Kaliszu], Martyn [Spuścizna Tadeusza Martyna z Kalisza], ref. 783, 830.

AP Kalisz [Archiwum Państwowe w Kaliszu], SPwOW [Starostwo Powiatowe w Ostrowie Wielkopolskim], *Ekshumacja zwłok z grobów bohaterów radzieckich*, Ostrów Wielkopolski 1948, ref. 104.

AP Kalisz [Archiwum Państwowe w Kaliszu], WBPP [Wojewódzkie Biuro Planowania Przestrzennego], ref. 1033.

AP Leszno [Archiwum Państwowe w Lesznie], PPRN Wolsztyn [Prezydium Powiatowej Rady Narodowej w Wolsztynie], ref. 833.

AP Piotrków Trybunalski OTM [Archiwum Państwowe w Piotrkowie Trybunalskim — Oddział w Tomaszowie Mazowieckim], MRNiPMRNwTM [Miejska Rada Narodowa i Prezydium Miejskiej Rady Narodowej w Tomaszowie Mazowieckim], ref. 1642–1647.

AP Piotrków Trybunalski OTM [Archiwum Państwowe w Piotrkowie Trybunalskim — Oddział w Tomaszowie Mazowieckim], ZPDU [Zbiór Plakatów i Druków Ulotnych], ref. 1767 (*Fotogazetka pt. „Armia Radziecka na straży pokoju i odbudowy świata"*, 1948).

AP Poznań [Archiwum Państwowe w Poznaniu], KPPPR [Komitet Powiatowy Polskiej Partii Robotniczej w Wolsztynie], ref. 2, 6.

AP Poznań [Archiwum Państwowe w Poznaniu], UWP [Urząd Wojewódzki w Poznaniu], ref. 3193.

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[50] While documenting the urban space of Kalisz over years, I witnessed several maintenance problems regarding the Soviet war cemetery in the town. In 2021, marble fragments broke apart from the central walkway around the obelisk. Turning some of those slabs upside down I found one with preserved parts of inscription in Polish; it reads as follows: „Pokój ich... 1935 [?]" ("Peace to [their shadows?] ... 1935 [?]". The re-use of such objects — possibly taken from some destroyed pre-1939 Polish memorial or grave — during the construction of the cemetery in 1945 proves the complex nature of these objects as 'heritage'.

AP Zielona Góra [Archiwum Państwowe w Zielonej Górze], KW PZPR [Komitet Wojewódzki Polskiej Zjednoczonej Partii Robotniczej w Zielonej Górze], ref. 342.

AP Zielona Góra [Archiwum Państwowe w Zielonej Górze], RMiUMGW [Rada Miejska i Urząd Miasta i Gminy Wolsztyn], ref. 641.

MOZK [Muzeum Okręgowe Ziemi Kaliskiej], DH [Dział Historii], ref. MOZK/H/5519 (*Cmentarz żołnierzy Armii Radzieckiej w Kaliszu*, 1978, ZBOWID WSK Kalisz).

MTM [Muzeum w Tomaszowie Mazowieckim im. Antoniego hr. Ostrowskiego], DH [Dział Historyczny], ref. MT/H/735 (*Album Pamiątkowy Poległym Żołnierzom Armii Czerwonej przy Oswobodzeniu Tomaszowa Mazowieckiego 1945*).

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